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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.



REPLY TO  
ATTN OF: AFXPD-PA

SUBJECT: An Analysis of the Cuban Crisis (U)

18 December 1962

TO: Colonel Howard L. Burris  
AF Aide to the Vice President  
Executive Office Building  
Washington, D.C.

Believe you will find the attached interesting and thought provoking. Makes one wonder if the Soviets are extraordinarily clairvoyant or, if not, accepting the author's thesis, what the alternative explanation might be. It should be kept in mind that while the data available to the author was incomplete, his logic and insight are reflected as excellent.

*Jerry*  
JERRY D. PAGE  
Major General, USAF  
Deputy Director of Plans  
for Aerospace Plans, DCS/P&P

1 Atch  
Doc, Subj as Above,  
dtd 12 November 1962,  
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or not attached, the classification  
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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE CUBAN CRISIS (U)**

**T. F. Burke**

**12 November 1962**

**DECLASSIFIED**

Authority OSD/IA 1/11/77  
By RMG, NARS, Date 6/23/77

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FOREWORD

This paper, written in the midst of the Cuban crisis, presents the author's personal and unprovable estimate of what the crisis is all about, some amount of prediction of how events will procede, and some remarks concerning an alternative course which this country could have pursued. As will be evident, the views presented here are at wide variance with the apparent popular view in the Western world at this time.

Inasmuch as merely delaying this paper until the outcome of current events is clearer would afford an opportunity to cancel it and thereby save the author the risk of embarrassment in being found to have been quite wrong, and inasmuch as the thesis here advanced is unprovable at present (if ever), one may wonder what motivates its presentation. The thesis is advanced that the Russians precipitated these events for specific primary and secondary objectives, and that events are turning out as they hoped. When these ideas were broached to various RAND colleagues during the first days one facet of their disagreement was their disbelief that the Russians could (or would) engage in such a devious and complex plan. In the author's view the plan--especially as viewed from Moscow--is not particularly complex. Not only are such schemes elementary by Russian standards, but also by the standards of any competent American political machine.

It will be impossible to claim, some months hence, that the course of events and the Russian plan were evident from the outset. Such a writer would be accused of mere second guessing. It would be argued that not only was no such reading of the situation possible, but even that the plan did not exist. Instead, it might be argued, the Russians blundered into the situation in a wholly different way and the outcome was, at most, a result of their good luck. Hence this paper seeks to call the turn in order to demonstrate that this interpretation of the whole affair was there to be seen from the beginning, and in order to refute the claim that the outcome was a matter of chance.

Even today the argument might be made that the writer now has the benefit of hindsight and that the Russian plan and purpose could not

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have been seen on 22 October. On the contrary: all the major features of this paper were discussed with several colleagues early 23 October.

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Although this paper is indeed an expression of the author's individual views, the expression has been improved considerably by the helpful comments of Dr. E. Bedrosian, Mr. A. Wessel, and especially those of Dr. H. Speier.

I. BACKGROUND

Now that the Cuban missile situation has arisen one might speculate, in retrospect, as to whether we could have predicted it. To this writer the likelihood seems very small. If it should appear that someone did indeed make the prediction, I would expect to find that it was advanced very tentatively, perhaps as one of a variety of vaguely possible Russian courses of action, and this turn of events could not have been singled out to have been notably likely. I make no claim for having thought of it at all prior to Monday, 22 October.

However once the fact of Russian missiles in Cuba was known one could immediately seek to explain why they were put there, how the Russians expected to operate in the subsequent period, what their primary and secondary objectives were, what their assessment of risks and costs seems to have been, and how the U.S. might meet the situation. This paper seeks to present a plausible set of hypotheses concerning these matters, albeit no more than unsupportable opinion and certainly not the only plausible hypotheses which could be framed.

The hypotheses to be developed stem from a preliminary group of hypotheses which serve as background--as input assumptions for what follows. These four preliminary assumptions, with an accompanying reason for each in turn, are:

1. The Russians did not expect their missile buildup in Cuba to go undetected until after operational status was achieved. That is: they did not expect to move so quickly as to sneak an operational system, full-blown and threatening, under our noses before we got wind of it.

The reason for this assertion is that the Russians knew we were flying reconnaissance missions over Cuba; Castro has protested the flights on several occasions. Furthermore the Russians have seen our aerial photography and can be under no illusions that their bases would be undetectable or unnoticed. Perhaps the Russians would have been pleased by our failure to detect the buildup (even this is open to question), but it is quite

incredible that they would have moved in on the expectation of going undetected. On the contrary, the odds favored detection and they must have known that.

2. The Russians did not expect that the U.S. would fail to react.

The reason for this assertion lies in a realistic estimate of both domestic and western hemisphere politics. In view of the Bay of Pigs failure and consequent wounding of U.S. pride, and the rather important public pressure on the President to impose at least a blockade--if not an invasion--on Castro even before the appearance of the Russian missiles, and the ongoing use of the Cuban question as a Republican issue in the election campaign, it could not have been deemed likely that the U.S. would react less strongly than we did. Indeed the imposition of a blockade was nearly the least that could have been done without committing domestic political suicide.

While complete Latin American support for U.S. action was not assured, nevertheless it would be difficult to conceive a provocation more likely to elicit strong support for counteraction. It would require a considerable misinterpretation to expect Latin American tolerance of a Russian nuclear weapon base in this hemisphere; anti-American sentiment is one thing, but Russian weapons are quite another. Hence, while the Russians would surely have been willing to accept our failure to react, they could not have gone into the event in the expectation that we would not.

3. The missiles were put in Cuba for political purposes but not for strictly military purposes.

Clearly these Russian weapons were much too soft and too vulnerable to attack to play a significant role during a central war. Such military worth as they had resided almost entirely in their possible first strike use. However even if these weapons were credited with completely successful first strike use in concert with other Russian weapons, their contribution to the diminution of U.S. capability would be insufficient to tip the balance. As matters stand such a Russian pre-emption would still have been suicidal. This is not to say that Russian strategic weapons deployed in greater number (and perhaps more survivable basing) would not suffice to alter the strategic balance, but only that this deployment did not. Further, this deployment cannot be regarded as the first phase of a bigger and longer-term buildup except as a conditional option which the Russians might subsequently have elected in the unlikely event that the U.S. failed to react to this deployment.

Thus it appears that the expected outcome of this deployment would not have offered a purely military benefit sufficient to warrant the risks and costs involved, and this could not have been the primary Russian motivation.

4. The risk of central war growing directly out of the Cuban crisis was small.

It is easier to dismiss the likelihood of Russian initiation than U.S. initiation. Quite apart from the apparent strategic military disparity in favor of the U.S., which makes Russian initiation intrinsically unattractive, it is elementary that one does not go out of his way to alert his enemy before attacking him, and once he is alerted one had better quiet him down again before hitting him.

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The U.S., claiming a credible first strike, and extending deterrence to the western hemisphere (President Kennedy's third point), is the more likely to initiate. The denial that such initiation was really imminent at any time during this crisis depends upon a recognition of the U.S. need for a sufficient excuse to initiate. We, at least so far, require a very good excuse to initiate and Russia provided no such excuse. It is widely agreed that the Russians rely on receiving fairly early political warning of U.S. preventive war or of a significant diminution in the U.S. requirement for a casus belli. Thus the Russian feeling of safety in this Cuban crisis must have been enhanced by the recent mood of the U.S. wherein there is very little sentiment for pre-emption or prevention.

These four assumptions establish a context within which to speculate on the Russian purpose in choosing to take a provocative action, likely to be detected, and likely to compel reaction, but not at all likely to put Russia in direct danger of attack.



## II. THE PRIMARY RUSSIAN OBJECTIVE

The Castro regime must have appeared, in the view from the Kremlin, as a very uncertain and expensive foothold in the western hemisphere. As an avowed communist government, which therefore cannot be allowed to collapse from its own deficiencies, Castro's Cuba is an economic burden upon Russia--very possibly thrust upon a reluctant Russian government which might have preferred a different time and place. Surely the Kremlin view of such an expensive luxury was that it must be made worth its cost.

The principal deficiency of the Cuban foothold was that its survivability was not convincingly great--largely because nobody could foretell whether and when the U.S. would invade. The Bay of Pigs left no doubt of the U.S. interest in active steps for the elimination of the regime. Any reading of our press would disclose that President Kennedy suffered a significant domestic political setback through his appearing to have acted less than resolutely. This setback, in a field of which he had made much in his own presidential campaign, was one which he could not afford to allow to grow still worse in the coming years. The current congressional campaign, in which Kennedy took active partisan part, further developed the Cuban issue as one of appreciable domestic importance. Looking forward a year or two to the next presidential campaign, the Russians must have found scant assurance that our forbearance would endure; they could not possibly have seen reason for confidence that we would not again take up arms against Castro--and this time topple him. The very exploitation of the Cuban foothold would make U.S. intervention all the more likely in rough proportion to the success of the exploitation.

Thus the Cuban regime was at risk, and it was impossible for Russia to eliminate the risk (except, of course, by the exceedingly difficult, expensive, and unattractive measure of making Cuba militarily impregnable). However what Russia could do, and did do, was to reduce the risk to a more acceptable level.

This was done by the creation of circumstances wherein the political restraint of U.S. action is enhanced, and wherein the political price which the U.S. must pay for the privilege of invading is raised to a level suitably commensurate with Russia's cost in the loss of the regime.

It is intrinsic in this objective that the timing of Russia's move was somewhat forced, not only in order to hasten the exploitation, but also in order to act before U.S. forbearance decayed even further because Russia wished to minimize the likelihood that their action would precipitate our invasion. That is: the Russian plan was founded in the estimate that they could precipitate a crisis right now (and could manipulate its progress) wherein the net risk of losing the regime to invasion would be less than the inherent risk if they took no preventive action, and that the consequences of their action, if successful, would be a fairly permanent reduction of risk.

It deserves note that Russia would very much rather preserve the regime than lose it, but that if their action had triggered our invasion they would not have deemed their action a blunder because this risk of loss was inherent in the situation. Furthermore their assessment of the loss would have been moderated by the numerous potential new footholds elsewhere in Latin America and by their propaganda opportunities to berate the U.S. for breaking the peace, subverting the peace-making machinery of the UN, and imposing gringo imperialism on suffering Latinos.

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### III. THE RUSSIAN METHOD

Given the foregoing objective, one can imagine the Kremlin ruminating over various ways to produce the needed crisis. Among the requirements to be met are not only the avoidance of undue risk--especially to Russia's homeland--but also that as many secondary objectives as possible are to be achieved. And the final requirements, which are essential:

1. A crisis must really be precipitated,
2. The provocation must be a strong one--so strong that the Kremlin does not foresee any need for a comparably provocative act in Cuba in the future.

The choice of strategic missile bases satisfies these last two requirements particularly well.

To add window dressing to this hypothesis: perhaps some of the seeming Russian haste in their site activation was in order to force the issue out at the height of the U.S. election campaign in order to increase the pressure for prompt response to the situation. In any event the haste would serve to heighten the atmosphere of crisis; so too would a partial veil of secrecy.

The Russian plan reached its peak at the time President Kennedy announced publicly his response. Had his choice been invasion the Russian behavior from that point on would have been easy enough to preplan, leaving only the details for moment-to-moment adjustment. Had our response been neither invasion nor blockade, no doubt the Russians would have suitable contingency plans for their subsequent conduct. However it is most interesting to examine some features of the plan the Russians probably prepared for use in case our choice were to blockade.

The primary purpose after 7 pm Washington time on 22 October was to moderate the provocation. The Russians, protesting all the while, would have seen to it that the UN machinery commenced to function had we not done so, and they did indeed make such moves. UN activity alone, in the view of many Westerners and neutrals, comprises a moderation of the crisis. At a suitable time, as U.S. patience gave signs of running

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out, the Russians yielded ground--including the dismantling of their own missile bases, although this no faster and no more thoroughly than necessary and always at a pace gauged to our impatience.

Meanwhile they wished the peace-making machinery of the UN to bog down. There were innumerable opportunities; Russia might have (and still can) engaged in a Geneva debate over the agenda of meetings, the composition of an inspection team, the requirement of a troika leadership of the inspection team, and so on--for years if necessary. No doubt they found other opportunities for delay in Mikoyan's visit and in Castro's recalcitrance (whether or not Castro is in cahoots on this). They have undoubtedly decorated the basic evolution of their plan with embellishments which have enhanced confusion, because equivocal conditions intrinsically hamper U.S. freedom to act and thereby afford greater warning time within which Russia can modulate its behavior in response to U.S. moods and actions. Various details, such as seemingly contradictory messages, can be interpreted as intentional contributions to confusion (or, of course, to real slip-ups in a bureaucracy which is controlling its detailed performance on an hour-by-hour basis).

Throughout this period of abatement the U.S. casus belli evaporated. Our allies no longer share our feeling of need for vigorous measures--and probably neither do some of our citizens who, on 22 October, would have supported invasion. On 22 October a high water mark was established --one which never before existed--and our action established that that specific and extreme provocation is not a casus belli. The water may never again reach that mark.

The Russians would be pleased to extract from us a guarantee that we will not invade Cuba, but the overt expression is unnecessary. The essential fact was established, and the principal Russian objective achieved, by 23 or 24 October. We can invade Cuba in the future, and with less excuse than we had on 22 October, but only at a severe price in the harm which would be done within our alliances in Europe, in Latin America, in Asia, and in our relations with the new African states.

In the interim we can expect Russia now to exploit the Cuban regime with new vigor. They now have a more solid platform from which to export communism.

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#### IV. SECONDARY RUSSIAN OBJECTIVES

Within the basic plan, and irrespective of how we react, there are several opportunities to attain secondary Russian objectives. Although one could examine these opportunities in the face of alternative U.S. reactions, it is most interesting to consider some which exist within the choice the U.S. did make (several of these would exist within alternative U.S. choices as well).

##### U.S. Response to Provocation

The Russian action presented the U.S. with one of the most extreme provocations which the Russians could create with comparative safety. Its nature was such as to elicit just about the strongest alliance support that the U.S. could expect. Few issues could be assured of arousing such strong domestic support for vigorous action. The provocation was placed on our doorstep in an area where our military superiority is unquestioned. It was decorated with overtones of secrecy, of nuclear danger, of Russian diplomatic double-dealing, all of which serve to justify a prompt and vigorous response.

Our response was, in fact, just about the least possible action that could reasonably be taken. We even limited the extent of our blockade to the exclusion of a few weapons--making it perfectly clear that our blockade would not be used even to shut off Russian material support to Cuba.

We are the nation, and this is the administration, which has of late made much of the prompt and appropriate use of conventional forces to meet provocation at a less-than-nuclear level. We have announced our intention to react conventionally and with appropriate vigor in Europe and elsewhere. This event suggests that we really have a slow fuse, and this suggestion will not be lost on the Russians, nor will they allow it to escape the notice of our allies. If this response is a measure of our determination then how might others expect us to react to a Soviet-supported Kurdish revolt in Iran--where the threat to ourselves is less, the clarity of guilt is less, the support of our allies is less, and our military capability is less?

Fear of Central War

I believe that widespread fear of the outbreak of central war-- however poorly founded in the specific circumstances which cause it-- harms the Western alliance and so serves the Russian purpose without creating notable counterpart harm in the communist camp. It is the Western world which has studied the intricacies of central war strategy and tactics and has studied extensively the damage which such a war would do. We have broadcast the information and insured that the layman has good reason for fear, and we have enunciated a Type II Deterrence policy for the defense of Europe which affords occasion for fear.

As these war scares recur many people, seeing small promise of enduring peace down this avenue, seek alternatives. Indeed the fact that they seek a variety of alternatives enhances the division of opinion which results. Some seek the extreme of unilateral disarmament, but a more significant portion come to accept the notion that a poorly-inspected and unsafe arms control agreement is justified. Others, notably France, find renewed reason to seek a national deterrent, free of dependence on us and so, hopefully, less likely to involve them in our troubles. Still others find reason to settle for one or another form of political compromise with Russia, including a variety of forms of neutralism. This is an erosive process which attains no particular Russian goal at any specific time, but which fosters and helps numerous other Russian attacks on Western unity.

There can be no doubt that a significant war scare was created in the West--not only in Los Angeles where the housewives stripped the grocery stores of canned goods--but also in England and Denmark and France. And it is equally clear that Khrushchev did what he could to enhance the war scare--for example, his statement that there is still a chance for peace as long as the nuclear rockets are not flying.

Disclosure of U.S. Alert Plans

When this nation reacts, as we did, by dispersing SAC, by sending the fleet to sea, and so forth, the Russians have an opportunity to

examine in minute detail our plans and procedures for going on an alert. Those who believe that Russia seeks an opportunity for surprise attack (I am not one) find this disclosure of our alert posture dangerous in itself. However even a less adventurous Russian, bent instead on a political victory, would find this information useful as indicators of U.S. intentions. He might feel somewhat more sure of his ability to foresee our blow and to moderate his provocations soon enough. There have been opportunities in the past to watch us in a crisis (e.g.: Lebanon) and there will, no doubt, be more in the future, but the observation of this crisis must have been a secondary Russian objective.

#### Overseas Bases Issue

By forcing a vigorous U.S. protest the Russians have resurrected their own long-standing objection to our overseas bases. They have reminded the world, in an emphatic way, that there really is reason to object. Of course, we have tried from the outset to draw a distinction between ours and theirs, and some of our allies tried to reiterate that distinction, but it seems doubtful that our case is sufficiently persuasive to offset the Russian case. (In this connection it is interesting to observe among some ordinary U.S. citizens a wry remark that they too think our distinction is unconvincing.)

Very possibly the IL-28's were included in the Cuban forces in order to include the case against bomber bases as well as against missile bases. If so, the essential feature was that they be bombers, but it didn't much matter which model.

In sum: the Russians probably scored here a point of moderate but enduring worth. They are likely to find it useful and we can expect to meet it again and again in the UN, in Geneva, and in propaganda.

It has been suggested widely that the primary Russian objective in the Cuban affair was to create trading stock and to compel a negotiated trade for some of our overseas bases (Turkey is the one often suggested). This hypothesis calls for the assumption that the Russians misjudged seriously the Western reaction--not only in the U.S. but

in NATO--to such a blatant power play. There are those who claim the Russians can and often do blunder that badly, but I find the claim incredible. The variety of forces at work to prevent such Western capitulation--U. S. domestic politics, the Berlin problem and the impact on German confidence, the fractionating effect on NATO, the debilitating effect on the Near East--make it unlikely that the Russians would precipitate the Cuban event on the expectation that such horse-trading was likely to succeed. It is quite incredible that they would ante up the Cuban regime on this gamble.

#### U. S. Blockade

The American blockade of Cuba offers, of course, some opportunities to score minor propaganda points on the "Yankee pirates." In itself this issue is very weak and the point is not likely to influence enough individuals to matter. However the evolving blockade situation offers an avenue to a somewhat more important point.

By a skillful control (but not at all difficult to accomplish) the Russians can create a protracted equivocal situation. On the one hand the Russian missiles and bombers are taken down and packed away in boxes (they may or may not be returned to Russia, depending upon whether that return seems to be needed to keep the play going) so as greatly to ease the tension of the crisis. The peace-making machinery of the U.N. (and assorted diplomats on the side) is at work arranging the inspection which the U. S. demands. Consequently our allies--almost with one voice--insist that we not invade; that we not scuttle the U. N.; that we not risk triggering nuclear war. However the U. N. negotiations, while not demonstrably stalled, are making slow and uncertain progress. Meanwhile the U. S. maintains its blockade, not stopping the flow of any materials or people which the Russians actually wish to send to Cuba, but violating international law and angering quite a few people day after day.

How does the U. S. dismount from its tiger? Do we invade and "scuttle the U. N."? Do we maintain the blockade perpetually? Do we just quit in disgust after a while? No matter which of these alternatives we chose we would lose either some face or some alliance support, either



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of which would suit Russia. Presumably the attainment of such an equivocal situation and its exploitation might be a secondary Russian objective.

#### V. RUSSIAN RISKS AND COSTS

There was no possibility that Russia could attain these various objectives without any cost. Indeed the cost which she has already paid is much of the basis for the widespread current belief that the West, and in particular the U.S., has scored a major cold war victory in the affair. However Russia can offset some of its losses by appropriate secondary moves (some of which are discussed below); some of the Russian setback is highly transitory and amounts to no enduring cost to Russia; and some of the losses are of a kind important to us (and so we count them) but unimportant to Russia (and so they care not a whit).

Before going on it is pertinent to emphasize that we need not suppose that Russia accepted the risks and losses of this crisis either easily or promptly. Very possibly there was a prolonged period of debate and inaction before a reluctant decision to go ahead. Such delay would, as noted above, contribute to our understanding of the comparative haste with which the offensive weapons were installed in Cuba after a more gradual buildup of defensive weapons. However the decision to accept risks and losses was made, and it is essential that we recognize the decision as one which reflects Russia's expectation of a favorable balance of gains and losses, rather than a total absence of loss.

#### Loss of the Cuban Regime

Certainly a major risk which the Russians accepted--I think the biggest by far--was that the U.S. would invade Cuba and eliminate the pro-Russian regime. However this was not an avoidable risk since we always could and still can, remove that regime. There was no course open to Russia which could wholly avoid this risk, so it was one they had no choice but to accept. In effect they chose a course such that they either take the loss now, when the loss is cheaper, or reduce greatly the risk and increase what it costs us to impose that loss on them.

Loss of Russian Prestige

Russia was almost certain to suffer some loss of prestige because all of the most likely outcomes of this crisis call for a Russian "retreat" before our response. In comprehending Russian acceptance of this probable loss it is important that we assess the worth of prestige from Russian values.

For Russian leaders, like American political bosses, prestige has value because it is useful--it is almost like a currency or a tool. One accumulates prestige, where possible, as a contribution to political power--in other words, for its effect on somebody else, not for its effect on one's self. Personal pride per se is not the purpose of prestige because one derives his pride from his real political accomplishments, and the role of prestige is only as a tool to be used or a currency to be expended to further the political ends. The Russian treatment of the Hungarian revolt illustrates the willingness to "spend" prestige.

In the West, and especially among the populace wherein a sense of national pride is important, prestige also involves the element of personal pride and this enhances its worth to us. Consequently the gain or loss of prestige between Russia and the West is not a zero-sum exchange. They value it less than we do, and it is somewhat as if they counterfeit the currency which we accept at face value. For this reason we are prone to overestimate the weight of prestige in the Russian balancing of gain and loss, and perhaps not to understand their acceptance of the loss of prestige. We should not overlook that prestige of the leadership is incomparably more important here, where the leaders must undergo frequent popular election, than it is in an oligarchy where the leadership can better defend its trading of prestige for objectives.

It is fundamental in the Russian view of prestige that, since it is a means to an end and not an end in itself, prestige considerations can never interfere with politically necessary moves. Goals are chosen on far more basic considerations, and the maximization of prestige is then sought as a secondary objective within the basic policy. When, as in this crisis, the goals demand it, prestige can be expended.

In this instance the Russian loss of prestige for backing down is partially offset by their opportunity to claim to be cool calm collected keepers of the peace who acted reasonably and yielded gracefully before the dangerously warlike Americans in order to spare mankind the holocaust which would have resulted had they chosen to treat us as we deserve. Perhaps as much opinion, worldwide, would be swayed by that line of hokum as by the equally hokum claim that the U.S. called Khrushchev's bluff and forced him to back down. It is unfortunate that the U.S. chose to congratulate Khrushchev's statesman-like conduct.

#### Loss of Castro's Prestige

It could have been foreseen that, almost irrespective of the turn of events in Cuba, Castro's prestige in Latin America as a nationalist leader would suffer severely when his role as a tool of Russia became clear. Inasmuch as the Cuban foothold is to be used to export communism under the guise of Cuban sponsorship, not Russian, this loss of prestige influences adversely the consumer acceptance of the export commodity. Consequently this question of Cuban prestige is more directly involved in the political goals than is Russia's own prestige and is therefore of greater importance in the Russian plan. There is no question of there having been an adverse reaction of disillusionment in Latin America to the overt disclosure of Russian influence in Cuba, and the Russian plan undoubtedly contains a means to conceal future Russian influence and to restore the appearance of Cuban nationalism and independence to the revolutionary regime. It is not hard to imagine one way this could be done: eliminate Castro.

All that is needed is to hang the whole black eye on Castro as an individual--find him guilty of subverting the revolution and toss him out to the wolves while retaining and redirecting the revolution. Which means: keep the regime. Consequently the author wonders whether Castro will last as long as it takes to get this paper into print. It remains to be seen how many of Castro's associates go with him; at present it seems likely that Fidel and Raul are sufficient, and maybe

even Raul can stay. After all, Russia needs someone who appears to be a popular leader in Cuba, and there aren't very many candidates.

### Consolidation of the West

If the Cuban crisis really did cause an enduring solidification of Western unity and a renewed determination for vigorous response to the communist challenge, then Russia suffered an enormous loss. The more so if this solidarity brought with it new insight into the character of our problems and of our appropriate behavior. It appears that Russia judged this risk to be acceptably small, and I find little reason for confidence that they lost their bet.

Of course the solidarity which was generated is not everywhere splendid. The reluctance of British, French, and Italian opinion to leap to our support was evident, and much Latin American hostility continues. As yet there seems to be relatively little evidence of a significant shift of previously uncommitted nations to our camp; their role seems instead to lie in the middle ground, as it was before, seeking compromise and the abatement of war danger at nearly any cost.

What is much more important to us as well as to Russia is that such new solidarity as was created is transitory. There have been similar occasions in the past when a crude Russian move reinvigorated us--the Hungarian revolt is an obvious example, and there are others--but a retrospective examination suggests that their real effect was fairly short-lived. Consequently although we can rejoice in even a transitory benefit, we should not overvalue our assessment of how significant a loss Russia deems it. They are more likely to observe and to judge the impermanence than they are the magnitude of the peak.

Closely related to this question is whether or not the West, and specifically the U.S., confronted Russia with a new militant spirit of determined opposition. Although the current prevalent view of our press is that we indeed did, this writer believes we did nothing of the sort. Instead we took approximately the least possible action (talk is not action) in view of the realities of domestic partisan politics, and it will be so understood in Moscow. If this and the other theses

of this paper are correct then there is some likelihood that an atmosphere of disillusioned dissatisfaction will set in after a while. Such a turn of opinion would probably make the residuum of the present air of solidarity more unfavorable than the atmosphere before Cuba just because of disappointment, discouragement, and frustration.

Furthermore, if our actions are deemed, in Moscow, to have been relatively weak and cautious then our actions may serve to invite further provocations elsewhere. I do not think Berlin to be a likely spot at present, partly because the coupling between Berlin and Cuba is very tenuous and theoretical, but also because Berlin is one of the few places where the Russians have some reason to fear that we might act with vigor right now. Such places as the Near- and Middle East would seem much more likely spots for Russian action in the near future. However we should note that, although the initial German reaction has been favorable, further consideration and observation may lead German politicians to reconsider and to decide that the U.S. actions were weaker than they at first seemed. This would occasion further loss of confidence that we would act with what Germans regard as appropriate vigor in Berlin. At some point such doubts could lead them to seek disengagement from us and some form of detente with Russia. (With some modification of detail the foregoing remark is extensible to Turkey and to CENIO and SEATO.)

Such disillusioned reaction has not now set in, and at present Russia has suffered a net loss in the creation of Western spirit and solidarity. Their assessment may include an anticipation of disillusioned reaction, and we should guard against their fostering it.

### Intelligence Risk

By placing these weapons in Cuba, close to the U.S. and at definite risk of capture or compromise, the Russians accepted an unusual risk (for them) of intelligence compromise. The risk is so unusual that the writer, lacking any information on this point, is led to surmise that there were no nuclear weapons in Cuba because their presence would enhance this risk without materially aiding the basic plan. We can

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also surmise that Russian security precautions must have been extensive and rigid, not only to keep the missiles out of U.S. hands but also out of Cuban hands.

VI. DEFICIENCIES IN THE U.S. ACTION

The basic announced U.S. policy in the Cuban crisis is addressed to a narrowly-framed very limited objective: the elimination of Russian strategic weapons in Cuba. It appears that we have completely failed to look to the future and to recognize that our appropriate objective should be the elimination of the regime which accepted these weapons.

The weapons afforded us a splendid opportunity to treat them as symptoms demonstrating the unacceptability of the regime in the western hemisphere. President Kennedy's speech to the nation might better have turned the principal fire on the regime rather than on Russia, and on the regime rather than the missiles. Above all it was a mistake to play up the strategic nuclear character of the provocation; the situation should have been regarded as political, calling for the appropriate use of conventional forces for stated political objectives. The President's third point--the extension of nuclear deterrence--should indeed have been stated clearly and consisely, but there should have been no other allusion to central war or to nuclear weapons. Our attitude in this regard should have been one of utter confidence that central war had nothing to do with this problem, that we had no concern for the threat posed by these Cuban missiles, and that we knew Russia wouldn't make a central war move because they couldn't. (Our attitude of confidence would, of course, be reinforced by a wider recognition in Washington that this is indeed the case.)

At the time the President went on TV the world was alert to the fact that a major crisis existed. It is this writer's view that invasion would have been just about as readily accepted as was blockade--especially if the central war theme were eliminated. Basically it doesn't matter much whether this is so, because there is no question that a preponderance of support for invasion was there to be had, not only in the U.S., but also in most of this hemisphere. It matters far less to us, in the long run, whether Mexico and Venezuela withhold OAS endorsement than whether the Cuban regime persists; our actions should reflect that elementary fact. We, who exhibit national concern for



being liked and for having friends, should pay some heed to the necessity of acting as if we deserved respect.

To go further on the question of the acceptability of invasion, it should be noted that no appropriate modern precedent existed to afford a standard whereby to judge whether invasion was justified. Had we acted as if there was no question whatever that these missiles constituted a casus belli then we would have established that precedent and that criterion then and there. Unfortunately we have established precisely the opposite. Now that the modern standard exists we will find it difficult to deny and difficult to violate. That is precisely the means whereby Russia has acquired a wholly-unjustified increased protection of the Cuban regime. At present there is much discussion of whether we have given an explicit guarantee not to invade Cuba, and of just exactly what the commitment is. However such an overt guarantee would be a luxurious window dressing upon the Russian success; as matters stand we have already granted a much more important de facto guarantee. Like any other guarantee, it can be violated, but only at a cost which could have been avoided.

In the future we can expect to encounter an endless series of provocative events centering in Cuba. We may find guerilla training camps established to train small armies for use in various Latin American countries. We can expect even more use of radio for propaganda, and perhaps also jamming of VOA broadcasts. Cuba may become a major warehouse and transshipping point for small arms to Latin America. Trawler bases and submarine bases may appear (perhaps for the use of a navy given to Cuba by Russia). None of these provocations matches the one we have spurned. Furthermore we must note that a casus belli really does not accumulate; only our frustration accumulates. This nation being what it is, and we hope will continue to be, we still need a casus belli despite all our frustration, and that will be withheld even though Russia is likely to operate close to the threshold.

VII. THE ALTERNATIVE U.S. ACTION

The U.S. should have invaded Cuba. Inasmuch as the net gain from such an act would be largely the retrieval of some position we lost a few years ago, we should not be misled as to the size of the victory to be won. However the invasion would prevent a substantial additional future loss and this is what offers the greatest part of the worth.

Once our basic policy was established it would have been important to adjust the details to improve the opportunities to attain secondary objectives and to diminish opposition opportunities to find or to create offsetting by-product consequences. For example we should minimize the appearance that we acted in a hasty or poorly controlled way so as to risk central war. Hence the manner of our invasion would be important.

In the writer's view the best course would have been for the President to announce on Monday evening that we will invade on Tuesday.\* This should not have been an ultimatum, nor should it have been conditional on any action or opinion anywhere in the world, and this fact should have been stated emphatically. We should have taken the position that the situation demanded a level-headed and calmly-controlled but vigorous police action by conventional forces of superior power.

The President should have announced that at daybreak fighter sweeps over the island will eliminate the Cuban air force, preferably on the ground. Similarly, that Navy forces will move in to eliminate the Cuban naval forces, especially the recently-acquired torpedo boats. He should then have gone on to warn the population to stay away from these points of attack,\*\* and to urge the Cuban forces not to put up useless

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If the state of readiness did not permit an invasion on the 23rd then the President's appearance on TV should have been delayed until we were ready.

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The writer believes that it would have been militarily feasible and politically very desirable to have announced the locations of the invasion points, not only to further protect noncombatants, but also to enhance the atmosphere of utter confidence, complete control, and overwhelming capability. No doubt the U.S. military would object on obvious grounds, but the point deserves consideration.

resistance. The President should also warn the populace to remain away from invasion beaches, air defense sites, etc.

The same speech should have gone on immediately to announce that our objective is the elimination of the regime, and that free elections will be held on 1 February under OAS and UN observation. In that election our only direct action or interest would be to prevent the imposition of a communist regime or of any other form of dictatorship, and that we will remain interested permanently in these conditions.

The stickiest problem we would face in this course of action would be the free elections. So far as this writer knows, no suitable democratic leaders (especially, non-Batista) have been identified and it is not clear just what kind of government a free election would produce. Perhaps it would be so inept and weak that we would have to shepherd it along for some time. Such an event is obviously undesirable because of the anti-American propaganda it invites, and even the most transparent cloak of concealment under OAS supervision would be helpful. In any case this would be the lesser in the choice of evils, and should not of itself deter us from invasion. Indeed it would be a situation we could even turn to our ultimate propaganda advantage if we comported ourselves well.

The other sticky problem would be the probable guerilla war which would remain after the conventional military operation was finished. Whereas we could capture the cities, utilities, military bases, communication and transportation facilities, airports, and harbors promptly (and probably with only moderate casualties in view of our ability to obtain total air superiority), we certainly could not afford to use U.S. forces to wage the protracted guerilla campaign--for both military and political reasons. We would have to rely on the new Cuban government doing this job with Cubans. We could hold the line until they are ready, and we could train, equip, and advise them, but the job would be theirs to do from the outset. However doubtful the success of the anti-guerilla campaign may seem, the President might well have felt that he could not accept any estimate that the job can't be done--there is no choice.

VIII. OTHER ALTERNATIVES FOR THE U.S.

Only two other alternative courses of action for us at that time occur to the writer: rely wholly on negotiating the missiles out of Cuba; attack the missile sites without invasion.

The first of these deserves only brief comment. Aside from the great likelihood that such negotiations would accomplish nothing whatever, such a policy aims at the wrong target. The objective should be the regime, not the missiles, and we aren't ever going to talk that regime out of existence. However the dominant objection to this course was that, no matter how devoutly its adherents might believe to the contrary, it would have verged on political suicide for the Democratic Party and consequently was not a real-world option open to President Kennedy.

The idea of bombing the missile sites out of existence demands more detailed discussion because it avoids Democratic Party suicide, it demonstrates a willingness to act vigorously (indeed it is much better than blockade from this standpoint), it avoids many of the costs associated with invasion, and it can be finished quickly and decisively.

From a military standpoint one could question the ease with which this really could be done. We would probably have to knock out some air defense sites as well, and the collateral damage that would be done might be rather more than we relish. Above all there is the nagging question of whether there would remain any undetected missiles; this course not only would not necessarily knock out the ones there now, but would do nothing to prevent new missiles being introduced covertly.

However the foregoing is only detail. The main deficiencies of this course are:

1. the missiles aren't the proper objective in the first place
2. this would do nothing to eliminate the communist regime  
(it even might engender a great deal of sympathy for Castro)
3. it suggests, by indirection, that the central war threat was our principal concern whereas that theme should be avoided.

For the foregoing reasons, and especially the third, the writer

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believes that it would be advisable to withhold direct attack on these missiles even during an invasion. We should instead rely on our strategic nuclear deterrent to keep the central war problem out of the picture, and should go about taking over the missile sites intact. No doubt the Russians would destroy the missiles before we got our hands on them, but the policy would be the better one for us to follow and we might accidentally get our hands on an intact missile.

IX. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

It is evident that this writer felt, as recently as August, that the U.S. was caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, that the Cuban regime posed a long-term problem and danger which would gradually worsen as the regime became emboldened, and which was not really likely to be displaced by any measure short of force. There is simply too little evidence in support of the thesis that widespread disapproval, votes of censure, internal unrest, or economic sanctions will unseat a communist-oriented police state supported by Russia. But on the other hand there was, in August, too little demonstrable case against Cuba to comprise a casus belli--the more so since the Bay of Pigs event increased general opposition to weakly-provoked U.S. armed intervention. Hence this writer, while believing that armed intervention to depose the regime would eventually be a necessity, saw no then-present opportunity and was then opposed to armed intervention.

Clearly I was predisposed to find, in the offensive missile buildup, the unforeseen but welcome casus belli--the opportunity for a needed but previously forbidden action suddenly appeared and I viewed it in that light at the outset. The effort in this paper to hypothesize a Russian rationale does not, of itself, bear on my basic view that invasion was needed sooner or later. On the other hand, although the spectrum of attitudes in Washington must have included some long-standing advocacy of invasion, the U.S. treatment of the crisis seems to indicate that the preponderance of views was not based upon a comparable predisposition to find an excuse for invasion. Clearly the prevalent assessment of the threat and of the proper means to deal with it was, and remains, different from mine.

There is no reason to doubt that the stakes are generally recognized to be the whole of Latin America (and, secondarily but importantly, other areas such as Africa and Asia), not just Cuba itself. There does appear to be a difference of opinion whether it is preferable to meet the threat at the source or at the target--a highly uncertain problem offering ample opportunity for disagreement.

More important is the apparent desire of the Administration to how to world order and to such world law and organization as exist. The appeal at the outset to UN intervention and inspection, the interest in OAS support, and finally the willingness to engage the Red Cross in inspection, point in this direction. It would be unfair to attribute this attitude wholly to interest in improving appearances; we are obliged to recognize in the Administration a sincere interest in world order for its own sake and a willingness to employ more difficult methods (and even less certain and less popular methods) for its furtherance. These are matters of practicality as well as principle with which this writer generally agrees.

Unfortunately principle alone affords Delphic guidance, as usual, because many principles enunciated in our own history and embodied in our famous documents seem to call for action to free Cuba from a tyrannical regime. Certainly neither side of this question of armed intervention has sole call on morality. The more pressing question is: which course was more likely better to serve the means and ends of morality and of world order? It is highly questionable whether deferred treatment or restrained treatment of the Cuban situation will indeed produce the better course of events--no matter what meaning is attributed to "better."

Granting, then, that the writer claims and grants no patent on wisdom or insight, there remain three features of U.S. policy and conduct in this affair which arouse dissatisfaction on fairly general grounds:

1. There is no public evidence that the Administration went beyond the first line of cliché in searching for an understanding of Russian motivation and objectives.
2. There is no public evidence that the earlier decision not to invade was reviewed in the light that the crisis would alter future opportunity to invade.
3. The U.S. conduct fell short of the optimum, even within the noninvasion context, because it enhanced or failed to minimize Russian opportunities in respect to Russia's secondary objectives.

On the first point: all evidence seems to indicate that the Administration was somewhat surprised by the advent of offensive weapons in Cuba (which surprise is excusable because there seems to have been no substantial basis upon which to predict their advent), and that there was a fairly protracted period of speculation as to what the Russians were up to. However the forms of speculation which have been reported are a catalog of American stereotypes. The primary predilection seems to have been to see this either as a move on the central war board or on the Berlin board or on the overseas bases board--all favorites in Washington. This is an unimaginatively short list, and the most remarkable omission from the list is Cuba itself; nobody seems to have suggested that the purpose of the event centered in Cuba as an entity in itself. Whether or not the hypothesis offered herein has merit, it would seem that the determination of policy should at least reflect the consideration of this and similar hypotheses.

As to the second point: it should be self evident that the course of these events would affect the future, and consequently this should have been an occasion to review decisions reached previously. Inasmuch as this crisis was probably unforeseeable--and seems not to have been foreseen earlier than October--it is inherent that an earlier decision not to invade was reached without any substantial consideration of the effect this crisis would have in altering the conditions which led to that decision. Indeed it could easily have been said in late August that that was not the time to invade but that the U.S. could always invade later if the situation worsened. However in October it became noteworthy that the unfolding events could make it much more difficult to invade later, and consequently that the previously-acquired view required reconsideration. There is, however, nothing available to suggest that such a basis for reconsideration was recognized. Rather it appears that the question of invasion was indeed reviewed but only in the sense of reconstructing the original line of thought without any alteration reflecting the new conditions.

In connection with the third of these points, the failure to optimize U.S. conduct even within the decision to blockade but not invade, the principal item is the failure to avoid the central war--



nuclear weapon atmosphere. Indeed the U.S. made specific reference to this interpretation of the events in various times and places, thereby considerably enhancing the effect. Inasmuch as this is at variance with the Administration's announced desire to shift the emphasis to limited war objectives and to conventional forces, Administration behavior is somewhat surprising and perhaps denotes that the veneer overlying the older massive retaliation concepts is still thin.

Our conduct has been less than optimum in other details which, in the long run, may turn out to have been important. We have established a narrow definition of what constitutes an "offensive" weapon and, by omission or by expression, a broad definition of what constitutes a "defensive" weapon. Furthermore we seem to have said that even a huge deployment of "defensive" weapons on our doorstep is acceptable. In the political maneuvering we have granted Khrushchev, quite needlessly, the mantle of statesman and have afforded him improved opportunity to pose as a savior. In accepting Red Cross inspection we have demeaned the UN by treating the Red Cross as an adequate substitute, and we have set an unfortunate precedent for incompetent inspection. We have also undercut our own original claim that the Cuban missile problem was terribly important.

If, as seems likely, Russia modulates the continuing evolution of this affair so as to withhold the casus belli while enhancing the frustration, then there is little prospect that the course of events can be reversed. It would seem highly unlikely that we will invade during the next year or two and the major features of this affair seem to be part of history, not current events. We can retrieve some of the ground which this writer believes we lost if we can learn from it some lessons applicable to the future. We still have a long way to go because, as Khrushchev said, the game is chess and we persist in playing it as five-card stud wherein there is only one hole card.